Disrupting Toronto's Urban Space through the Creative (In)terventions of Robert Houle

Alterando el espacio urbano de Toronto a través de las (in)tervenciones creativas de Robert Houle

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Abstract: This essay addresses the concealed geographies of Indigenous histories in the City of Toronto, Canada, through selected artworks that address history, space, and place. The research is grounded in the idea that the selected artworks narrate Indigenous stories of place to visually demonstrate an alternative cartography that challenges myths of settlement situated in the colonial narratives of archaeology and geography. Indigenous artist Robert Houle has created artworks that narrate Indigenous stories of place using the memories and wisdom of Indigenous people in areas of art, archaeology, and geography (land). This visual map is grounded in the premise that the history of the land is embodied in Indigenous knowledge of concealed geographies and oral histories. It relies upon concepts of Native space and place to demonstrate the significance of the embodied knowledges of Indigenous people and highlights the importance of reading the land as a valuable archive of memory and history.

Keywords: Indigenous; art; geographies; space; urban; Toronto; Canada; 20th-21st centuries.

Resumen: Este ensayo aborda las geografías ocultas de las historias indígenas en la ciudad de Toronto, Canadá, a través de obras de arte seleccionadas que abordan la historia, el espacio y el lugar. La investigación se basa en la idea de que las obras seleccionadas narran historias de lugar indígenas para mostrar visualmente una cartografía alternativa que desafía los mitos de asentamiento situados en las narrativas coloniales de la arqueología y la geografía. El artista indígena Robert Houle ha creado obras de arte que narran historias de lugar indígenas, utilizando la memoria y la sabiduría del pueblo indígena en las áreas de arte, arqueología y geografía (tierra). Este mapa visual se basa en la premisa de que la historia de la tierra es parte del conocimiento incorporado de las geografías ocultas y las historias orales de los pueblos indígenas. Se basa en conceptos de espacio y lugar nativos para demostrar la importancia de los conocimientos consagrados de los pueblos indígenas y destaca la importancia de leer la tierra como un valioso archivo de memoria e historia.

Palabras clave: (Lo) indígena; arte; geografías; espacio; urbano; Toronto; Canadá; siglos XX-XXI.

The geopolitics of place is present in urban spaces because large numbers of Indigenous people reside in cities making the locality of the city a dynamic object of inquiry in Indigenous studies.[1] The recent re-migration of Indigenous people to the City of Toronto, Canada makes Toronto a relevant site of critical investigation into the everyday lived experiences of Indigenous people. Further, the city is a space that the land itself holds the memory of thousand years of histories and relationships to that place. The research project I have engaged in for over ten years brings forth the concealed geographies of the City of Toronto through Indigenous artists and specific artworks related to Toronto. The research is grounded in the principal that art can create the epistemological, critical, and phenomenological conditions necessary to critically analyze and challenge officially constructed linear histories through stories of place and by directly engaging in a dialogue with the archaeology and geography of space. My research is grounded in the idea that artworks can narrate stories of place that creatively demonstrate an alternative cartography, one that challenges and contradicts myths of settlement situated in the narratives of colonial archaeology and geography. The works I discuss shed light on Indigenous peoples' relationships to and experiences within cities such as Toronto. These artistic/creative interventions thus provide archival material for a critical investigation into Indigenous stories of place.

This article situates Saulteaux artist Robert Houle (*1947) within a framework of Native space. As I will argue, Houle's artwork confronts settler mythologies regarding the occupation of space and challenges these constructs by bringing into public discourse counter-models of Native space articulated through Indigenous stories of place. His re-mapping of the City of Toronto is grounded in ideas of geography, history, and Indigenous knowledge in ways that, I argue, complement the notion of Native space as a network of relationships akin to those traditionally navigated over waterways and across land. Bringing these connections to the forefront challenges the grid system constructed by settler culture that overwrites Indigenous mappings of the cityscape. Houle's artwork creates the conditions for a transformative reading of space in which a viewer can engage with the public art works without being interpellated or bound into the colonial binary. In addition I explore the Anishinaabe map of the cosmos implicit in Houle's artwork. This cosmological structure allows a focus on the power of naming and the ability to create Indigenous self-histories rooted in Native space.

The works by Houle that I will look consist of a series of four projects from 1997. With the exception of *The Teamway*, located at York Street Gateway, all of the works are untitled. Houle's projects were created in conjunction with five urban designers and were funded by the City of Toronto. The overall purpose of these projects was to map

1 According to Statistics Canada (2016), 867,415 of Aboriginal people lived in a metropolitan area of at least 30,000 people, accounting for over half (51.8 %) of the total Aboriginal population. From 2006 to 2016, the number of Aboriginal people living in a metropolitan area of this size increased by 59.7 %. The census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Winnipeg (92,810), Edmonton (76,205), Vancouver (61,460) and Toronto (46,315) had the largest Aboriginal populations over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada lives in urban centres.

the cityscape of Toronto through the Garrison Creek tributary, the Don River, and the small tributaries that run along Yonge and York Streets feeding into Lake Ontario. The artworks consist of bronze and copper castings embedded permanently into the foundations of buildings at two sites and into cement sidewalks at two others. Much of the work was inspired by existing Great Lakes petroglyph imagery.[2] The metal castings range in size from small to large, with an average of two to three feet in length. The smaller castings primarily depict creatures or small objects, while the larger ones show maps.

At the corner of Trinity Bell Woods Park at the intersection of Queen West Street and Gore Vale Avenue there is a large metal cast of a map of Garrison Creek in the corner of the sidewalk. This work is part of the perimeter of the park and is six feet wide by eight feet long. Smaller casts surrounding the map showcase the leaves of indigenous flora. Moving directly south from the park, small casts of water creatures are found in the sidewalk of Walnut Avenue. The images continue south to a play structure at Stanley Park where water creatures have been inserted into the park's cement barrier. Walking toward Union Station from the park, following the natural flow of Garrison Creek, takes us into the underground tunnels of the subway. The third work, *The Teamway,* is located in the York Street Gateway. It includes a large metal cast on the wall showing the history of the area, including information about the Indigenous icons depicted in the work and archival photographs of the development of the area. These images include: a Turtle,[3] the Great Serpent,[4] Fish,[5] Trade Silver,[6] Great Water Panther (*Meeshupishu*),[7] Shaman/Ancient Teacher,[8] the Canoe,[9]

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2 The petroglyphs are sacred rock carvings that have existed for thousands of years, holding memories and stories. They are painted in pictogram form and have multiple potential meanings, depending on the creator or group of people that created them. There are people who are keepers of these stories and have a deep understanding of the land.

3 An important motif found on pieces of trade silver, the turtle represents many things to Native People, including patience, longevity, and fertility. In Anishinaabe stories of creation, the world was built on the back of a turtle following the great flood. Hence the Americas are often called 'Turtle Island'.

4 The Great Serpent is an ancient and powerful being who lives under the earth and is known to move through water, and is believed to be the cause of flooding and earthquakes. Snakes are also symbolic as creatures that bring renewal and regeneration – appropriate here because *The Teamway* has been regenerated from an old, unused space.

5 Fish represent a time when this area was under water and today's Front Street was part of the shoreline of Lake Ontario.

6 Trade Silver was an important item of trade between Native People and Europeans in the early and mid fur-trade period in the Great Lakes area starting in around 1600s. Its beauty and value stressed the importance both sides placed upon that relationship, and it therefore came to assume immense ceremonial and diplomatic significance. The images presented here are based on Iroquois trade silver broaches from the Royal Ontario Museum collection that signify the Seneca Village of Teiaigon ca. 1676.

7 The most prominent image inside the Great Serpent is the horned Great Water Panther or *Meeshupishu*. This image is derived from a painting at Myeengun's rock on Lake Superior and honours the Mississauga people circa 1720. *Meeshupishu* was a dangerous being to travellers and had to be appeased with an offering of tobacco or other sacred herbs placed on the water prior to a journey.

8 Shaman or Ancient Teacher is derived from petroglyphs known to Native people as the 'Teaching Rocks'.

9 Native people used the canoe extensively as a means of transport on rivers and lakes. Canoes were also believed to carry the souls of shamans and other beings from one level of existence to another.

and the Thunderbird (*Pinisi*).[10] There are also icons that represent the industrial history of the area, including an image of a locomotive and a horseshoe. Each icon is embedded in the foundation of the building and is linked to different local histories of that space. Many of the icons are embedded in the body of the Great Serpent, which snakes through the entire corridor.

Continuing with the flow of the waterway, viewers finds themselves at the intersection of Yonge Street and Queen's Quay, where Garrison Creek feeds into Lake Ontario. At this location there is another artwork entrenched in the cement that marks distances from that point to various named communities across Ontario. The viewer is able to see the title of each town and its distance from that centre point at Yonge and Queen's Quay. The artist has been careful to include many northern communities such as Sault Saint Marie and North Bay. This installation consists of a lighted metal semi-circle cantilever that floats out over Lake Ontario. The fourth work is located on the Queen East Bridge going into Leslieville, but will not be discussed here.

Situating concepts of Native space

The canoe methodology encompasses Indigenous worldviews and both produces and is embedded within Native ideas about space. I have written and argued that

> The canoe as a methodology creates the conditions to have a strong sense of self-awareness, forging genuine collaborative efforts in the collection of stories, artifacts, archives and cultural memory provided by elders, artists, historians and archeologists. The canoe circles through time and space, assembling living histories that are linked to the earth, water, creatures and humans (Nagam 2014, 68).

The canoe can metaphorically and literally bear witness to past and current Indigenous stories of place in the City of Toronto. Indigenous historian Lisa Brooks (2008, 3) writes about Native space:

> [...] when Europeans arrived on the Algonquian coast, they entered in to this Native space: a network of relations and waterways containing many different groups of people as well as animal, plant, and rock beings that was sustained through the constant transformative 'being' of its inhabitants.

Articulating a related theory of Native space, Indigenous cultural and literary scholar Mishuana Goeman (2008b, 300) states:

This beautiful image is found on teaching rocks not only in North America but also in Finland and Northern Russia.

10 Thunderbird, also called *Pinisi*, is the protector of people and an enemy of the Great Serpent, underwater panthers, and other underwater creatures. Along with Ancient Teacher, the Thunderbird balances the powerful presence of the *Meeshupishu* and the Great Serpent.
These names are based in the Algonquin language, *Anishinaabemowin*, the language of the Anishinaabe nation, one of the older and historically important Indigenous languages in North America. These nations are situated around the Great Lakes, in the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, as well as in the northern United States.

> Understanding Native space as a set of connections from time immemorial thus counters the spatializing power of Western patriarchal law. Our ability to understand the connections between stories, place, landscape, clan systems, and Native Nations means the difference between loss and continuity. Stories in all their forms continue to bind these fragile, complex, and important relationships to each other.

These theories and connections define Native space, forging networks through stories and relationships to land. Goeman adds that colonial process have brought Indigenous stories of place into relationship with settlers, new immigrants, and other Indigenous nations. These stories and relationships are fragile and complex because they are bound to histories of conquest, capitalism, and colonialism. Thus, while Native space is created through connections to the spaces and relationships between us and the natural world, colonial space is created through tensions of capitalism, conquest and control. Goeman (2008b, 296) argues, "'Colonial Spatializing' is the nationalist discourse that is embedded in the social and cultural spheres, which stake a claim to people, and mark territories of the physical space". City spaces such as Toronto and other large colonial cities display the tension between Native and colonial space as centres of capitalism and permanent markers of conquest. Colonial spatializing is present in monuments, street names, buildings, and the overall city planning.

Mapping the dis(rup)tion

The concept of land needs to be unpacked in order to better grasp Indigenous stories of place. Indigenous peoples' relationship to the land has been built over thousands of years and the notion of land has significant value. I do NOT want to lock all Indigenous people into a monolithic, passive relationship to 'the land', however, throughout my past and present research and theoretical work land has appeared at the crux of Indigenous stories of place. The notion of land that I am working with builds on the premise that people transform and build relationships with the physical spaces they inhabit. Simultaneously, land absorbs and records the living history of these actions. Land documents the transgressions and transformations of colonial and Native space. The relationships and connections that Indigenous people form with land divulge stories of place.

Teasing out concepts of Indigenous stories of place can be done further by Goeman's (2008a) essay "From place to territories and back again: Centering storied land in the discussion of Indigenous nation-building", she argues for the recognition of the importance of

> [...] land as place because that is at the heart of Indigenous identity, longing and belonging. Indigenous peoples make place by relations both personal and communal experiences and histories to certain locations and landscapes – maintaining these spatial relationships is one of the most important components of identity (Goeman 2008a, 24).

Ideas of longing and belonging are a part of Indigenous identity, and identity is tied to an idea of place. Indigenous identity is fused with spatial relations that are part of physical and imagined ideas of land, and these are apparent, for example, in the artistic work of

Rebecca Belmore and Jeff Thomas (Nagam 2012; 2013), as well as Robert Houle. Goeman situates Native ideas of land in "resistance to a conception of fixed space" (2008a, 24). She argues that land is used strategically, but is deployed with different meanings by artists, storytellers, elders, medicine people, and scholars (2008a, 24). Stories are created through connections to land and grounded in the idea that space should be understood as a "node", which differs from a "linear time construct marked by supposed shifting ownerships", and is thus "a powerful mechanism in resisting imperial geographies that order time and space in hierarchies that erase and bury Indigenous connections to place and anesthetizes settler-colonial histories" (2008a, 24). Stories of place break from linear factual time grids and are dialectical rather than fixed (2008a, 24) and this works within the concept of node or ideas circular time models. The flexibility created by breaking with linear time opens up the possibility of challenging white settler colonial ideologies in the occupation of space through Indigenous stories of place. This is possible because stories of place are a part of embodied and living knowledge that is situated outside of linear time frames.

The lines and grids on maps and documents are part of the new political ordering of space that controls and colonizes a territory. Other geographies are buried in the land, not marked on the maps created with the colonial tools of the traditional Western cartographer. The landscape now known as the City of Toronto is bound in both colonial geographies and the concealed ones that lie beneath the surface of the city's grid. The production of this space is bound to constructions of the Native body as Other – mapped out of the space (Brealey 1995). It is not its labour that is needed or wanted but the dispossession of its land (Coulthard 2007). Maps play a critical role in authorizing this dispossession. Geographer Brealey (1995) argues that maps are part of the process of territorialization through the ideological positioning of the 'master/slave' relationship. Brealey refers to a dialectical politics of recognition between master and slave drawn from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* There is a level of performance or thematization in the relative geographic position of the master and slave. Brealey states (1995, 141), maps "effectively inscribe and transmit the terms of reference in which concepts of space and territory (and the cultures within them) are formulated, evaluated, rhetoricized, and 'memorized' for subsequent generations". Maps are created in part to subsume Indigenous people into the Euro-Canadian context and worldview. However, doing so is not as simple as discarding Aboriginal spatializations of territory, because maps have material consequences. Colonial maps are etched onto real and imagined perceptions of the land. Brealey writes (1995, 153), "the dialectically 'imagineered' the territorial support for their own '(sub)national community' which – while in some sense still tied by tradition to its trans-Atlantic umbilical – could then begin to consolidate its own sovereign identity". The sovereign identity of Canada is built on settler ideologies regarding the occupation of space. The colonial story allows the settler to be remembered as the rightful new owner of the land, and this ownership is reinforced through the power of maps to re-name and reclaim land for the settler (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Robert Houle, Garrison Creek Map
(photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

The purpose of the cast bronze map at the southeast corner of Trinity Bell Woods Park is to bring forth the buried Garrison Creek and to make a connection with the ancient Lake Iroquois. Garrison Creek once flowed south through ravine land from the ancient Lake Iroquois shoreline, now at Davenport Road, to Lake Ontario. Along the way, it provided a fresh water source for Fort York. With the westward expansion of the City of Toronto in the late 1880s, the creek was enclosed in an eight foot diameter Victorian brick Sewer and the ravine filled in. Today, all that remains are the traces of the ravine, visible in city parks located along the course of the former creek. Surrounded by the word 'water' in 24 languages, Houle's map shows the route of the original waterway superimposed over existing streets. Rediscovering Garrison Creek makes it possible to connect the ancient Lake Iroquois shoreline with present day Lake Ontario shoreline.
The map reveals the underground movement of the creek through the grid of the city's neighbourhoods and parks. At the foreground of the map is the creek and blocks of space that represent the parks of the City of Toronto surrounded by moving water. The word 'water' written in 24 different languages[11] along with an icon to represent water borders the map. The water icon can be described as two inverted 'Ws'. At the bottom of the cast is an inscription of the title on this map, *Rediscovering Garrison Creek.* In

11 Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous are represented.

addition, small casts of leaves embedded in pillars surrounding the map and the park represent trees indigenous to that particular eco-zone. The work was inspired by Houle's interest in Chief Pontiac and misuses of his name in American culture, which the artist also explores in a larger body of artwork called *Sovereignty over Subjectivity*. In his investigation of car culture he found an advertisement for a Pontiac car featuring a picture of the now buried Garrison Creek Bridge, which inspired this work (Houle 2010).

Figure 2. Robert Houle, detail of Garrison Creek Map (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

The map created for this project encompasses both traditional methods of cartography and ideas of Native space. It shows a grid that is recognizable as a standard map of the city and at the same time foregrounds a waterway that reveals the importance of water and its relations. Including the word water in different languages along with its icon allows all people and communities to participate in Indigenous stories of place. This communal connection joins the past and present to the buried creek, encompassing thousands of years by linking the shorelines of Lake Iroquois to Lake Ontario. Throughout that time, water has contributed to the livelihood of Indigenous people as well as settlers, and the map brings to light the concealed geographies of the space – Native space – in a network of waterways and relations. The mouths of creeks and rivers in the area of Toronto hold significant value for the Algonquin peoples. For many Indigenous nations waterways are a place to gather and the preferred location to build camps and communities. Therefore, waterways provide a deep connection to the land and its inhabitants. At the same time,

water has also played an important role for settlers. Proximity to a body of water was considered desirable for the creation of a sustainable settlement. In the Toronto area, British settlers felt that a port would be a strategic advantage in the event of war with the United States or local Indigenous nations. This is one of the major reasons for the creation of the city at its current location around what is now the Harbour Front.

Houle's map is significant because it holds the buried connection to the waterway and Indigenous stories of place. By foregrounding the water system it confronts viewers with knowledge of history and space. At the same time it links the waterway to existing green space (parks and recreation locations) in the city, thus making a connection between water and land. The union of parks and waterways is logical within concepts of Native space because of fundamental links between water and land. Land and water systems work together in Indigenous views of space, forming a set of networks and relationships akin to those traditionally navigated over waterways and across land. Goeman (2008b, 299) states that Native space forms a part of how we look "at our social, political, spatial community, one that allows for strong, mobile, symbolic identity that underlies, and perhaps even belies, external influences". In the past, and still in the present, land is mapped out by place names that reflect physical location and relationships to the natural environment. Indigenous practices of naming space and relating to place are in direct contrast to the naming practices of the settlers. The space which is now the City of Toronto has long been a lifeline and meeting place for many Indigenous nations because of the intricate water systems and portage routes that cross it, which have caused Indigenous nations and identities to fluctuate and transform with time within this space. Houle's map represents the pathways that have enabled exchanges of knowledge and goods for thousands of years, allowing viewers to see the landscape within the framework of Native space.

In addition to the map, the small metal casts of animals/creatures embedded into the pavement follow the flow of the buried Garrison Creek. These creatures provide clues to Indigenous stories of place in the area. When Houle created the artwork he planned for these pieces to be subtle and non-intrusive, the better to encompass Indigenous relations to the space (Houle 2010). Those who walk with purpose and awareness will notice these small bronze and copper casts embedded into the cement of the sidewalk. All the beings are linked to water and remind viewers of the creek that runs beneath their feet. Houle says (interview, June 21, 2010): "When you walk, each piece can remind you of what has been there, what is underneath". Each creature marks the space with the history and meaning of all of their different relations. The way a person moves through the space will be determined by their knowledge of history and their relationship to each creature. For example, when walking over the copper cast turtle, the idea of the Haudenosaunee creation story might come to mind, or the Anishinaabe story of creation, helping the walker understand that the cityscape has stories of place and history outside of its common structures. Thus, the story of the past is brought to life with one tiny turtle placed in the sidewalk. Perhaps the walker will relate the image to

the creation story of Turtle Island. But many people will rush by unaware of this intervention. For the few people that make the connection, a familiarity and a relationship is built through these metal casts of creatures/animals that tell of Indigenous stories of place. Another example is the cast crab embedded underneath the street sign for Meegwetch Street, which itself marks the space with the Anishinaabe language. Houle (interview, June 21, 2010) describes his feelings when he noticed the sign above his artwork: "In the city there is an Anishinaabe name here – a rewarding thing to have a sign with something familiar, a cultural significance. I say, hey, my ancestors are here – and for that I say meegwetch to that too!". All of these small creatures mark the space through their presence, and it is this presence that begins the process of decolonization through Indigenous stories of place.

On a small but significant scale Houle's artwork challenges the political landscape by reminding anyone who passes by that there are multiple histories lying beneath their feet, whether or not they fully understand them. The copper/metal creatures and the copper cast map demonstrate how we might imagine the space differently. If we think about the space through the network of waterways and all the creatures that have been affected by the industrialization of the city, we begin to understand the multiplicity of Indigenous stories of place. Indigenous people are linked to these stories through strong relationships to waterways and the land. These places hold histories and meanings for many people, and Houle's artwork presents an opportunity to open up the space to allow for these multiple histories, which include Indigenous stories of place.

Transformation of place

For Houle, there is a tension between Native and colonial spaces illustrated through the power dynamics of differing worldviews, primarily shaped by the civilized (modern) / savage (archaic) dichotomy. Houle's artwork breaks down the barriers produced by these colonial power dynamics by provoking a recognition that we are in a colonial urban space but at the same time indicating a history that ties us to a different kind of relationship to space, one arising from Indigenous stories of place. The creatures in Houle's artwork mark the space in ways that are non-confrontational, which allows people to interact with them at various levels. Houle's work attempts to re-organize the space through small-scale artworks that cause disruptions to regular urban spatial relations. These moments of interaction allow people to grasp the multiple histories and Indigenous stories of place, and as they do so they begin to discover the transformative possibilities.

Houle's artwork dismantles the colonizer/colonized dichotomy into transformative spaces where people can interact with his art without being bound to the colonial binary. There are multiple ways in which viewers can use his artwork to explore Indigenous stories of place. As described above, a glance at the different metal casts could prompt the viewer to think about the different histories and ideas that each image portrays. But, interpreting the images could also inspire the viewer to create a story of their own.

Others might recognize immediately that the images reference Indigenous stories of place. For some Indigenous people the work could offer them a sense of connection to their history and a better understanding of their relationship to both the images and their location within a broader notion of Indigenous space. Other individuals might continue down the sidewalk totally unaware of what lies beneath their feet. Different people will engage differently with the work. Those who do engage with it may incorporate alternative narratives into their everyday reality in the urban space of Toronto. For Indigenous people, stories of place are narratives that are:

> [...] our representations of land and socio-scapes that are produced and as a result inform everyday realities, yet with tribally situated stories the possibilities for change abound. It is narrative that brings into being meanings around the concept of land and it is the meanings we choose to believe that effect change communally and individually (Goeman 2008a, 26).

The land holds the stories and it is Indigenous peoples' relationships to land that enable us to communicate stories of place. Houle has created an artwork that allows for everyday interaction with concepts of Native space. These interactions can be seen in all three of his artworks discussed here, because each of them tells Indigenous stories of place. The artist's use of the languages of many nations (including non-Aboriginal nations) expresses the possibilities associated with seeing space as an ongoing story that connects both Native and non-Native narratives. Placing small creatures/animals throughout the City of Toronto disrupts colonial constructions of space – Houle's primary objective.

Connections to cosmos and land in stories of place

Houle's *The Teamway* is located at York Street and consists of a large plaque on a wall that tells the history of the York Street Gateway. The installation combines the ontology of Indigenous worldviews and the industrial history of the space through symbols and icons. The information is presented through Indigenous icons and archival photographs of the development of the area. The images include a Turtle, the Great Serpent, Fish, Trade Silver, Great Water Panther (*Meeshupishu*), Shaman/Ancient Teacher, the Canoe,and the Thunderbird (*Pinisi*). There are also icons that represent industrial history, including a locomotive[12] and a horseshoe.[13] Each of the icons narrates local histories of space embedded within the Great Serpent, which snakes through the entire corridor. Each has a distinctive graphic trademark that ties them to the others. They are highly stylized metal casts that create a kind of warmth in a downtown underground tunnel with low lighting. The icons are highly reminiscent of the stylized pictures of the Great Lakes petroglyphs (Figure 3).

Together, the images of *The Teamway* create stories through urban-based knowledge, similar to teaching rocks in rural and remote settings. The narrative these iconic images

12 The stainless steel image of the locomotive reminds us that since the 1850s several railways have served passenger and cargo traffic in this area.

13 Horseshoes recall the days when horses worked faithfully moving cargo.

tell begins with the Great Serpent and extends to the horseshoes and locomotive. While these industrial icons are also located outside of the Great Serpent, their presence is no match for the force behind the Great Serpent. The giant head of the serpent is close to the industrial icons, demonstrating its power as it snakes through the entire space carrying inside it the images of the *Meeshupishu*, Fish, Turtle, and Trade Silver. At the end of its tail is the Thunderbird and Shaman, who balance the Great Serpent's power. The Shaman appears as a small person with a large bolt coming out of his head, which represents communication between the earth world and the sky world. Above him is the Thunderbird. The Shaman and the Thunderbird images are created in a particular way to demonstrate their power. Their bodies are in copper, a metal associated with power. On the left side near the end of the serpent's tail is an icon of people in a canoe. They witness the transaction between the cosmos and the ancient beings (Figure 4).

Houle has placed each of the symbols with purpose throughout the space to tell a story. The icon that depicts the Anishinaabe people canoeing towards the lake follows the path of the Fish and the Turtle, who are swimming back towards the lake. These creatures need the water and are seeking their home. The people know and trust that these beings will lead the way, so they follow them. In Anishinaabe culture there are specific distinctions between particular objects that are animate and inanimate, although these terms would not always match with similar western categories (Hallowell 1975, 146-147). The icons created for this work embody an Anishinaabe ontology in which animate agency is distributed across what in Western culture would be considered a wide range of both beings and things. Many of the images in the artwork depict objects and creatures with animate characteristics that have relations to the cosmos. The cosmos represents the philosophical and spiritual belief system that is embodied in an Anishinaabe worldview and being and can be thought of as the foundational philosophical condition of how space is organized. The Shaman or Ancient Teacher is an instrumental being who has a strong connection to the cosmos. In this installation the Shaman appears below the Thunderbird. The line running up from his head represents the power he possesses and its ability to communicate. The Thunderbird (*Pinesi*) is an animate being who carries power as the dominant being of the sky world. He is both a human and non-human being:

> [...] a creative synthesis of objective naturalistic observation integrated with the subjectivity of dream experiences and traditional mythical narrative which, assuming the character of a living image, is neither the personification of a natural phenomenon nor altogether animal-like or human-like being. Yet it is impossible to deny that, in the universe of the [Anishinaabe], Thunder Birds are persons (Hallowell 1975, 154-155).

These creatures inhabit the sky world and are capable of metamorphosis, including into human form. In this installation, the Thunderbird is responsible for a massive storm that separates the Toronto Islands, located just offshore,[14] from the mainland.

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14 See Toronto map (Figure 1) as there are islands that are a short ferry ride from the shore line in Lake Ontario.

Figure 3. Robert Houle, *The Great Serpent* (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

Figure 4. Robert Houle, *Thunderbird*, (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

The connection between Houle's artwork and the area of the Toronto Islands is found in the historical land settlement plans of Upper Canada. As I mentioned, British settlers considered it desirable and preferable to construct a township along a body of water. At a meeting[15] in 1806 the Crown and the Anishinaabe people know as Mississaugas of New Credit stated that the boundaries were not defined in the Toronto Purchase[16] which is the agreement of the area that we now know as Toronto and wanted to include the waterways. In exchange, they conceded that the Anishinaabe people had fishing and hunting rights within the waterways. This compromise came at a time when most of the natural habitat had been either fished or hunted out – a loss Houle commemorates and communicates by illustrating animals/creatures migrating back to the lake. The purchase included the Toronto Islands (although this is not indicated on the map of the concession), and unfortunately this was a great loss for the Anishinaabe people. The Toronto Islands represent a sacred space for Anishinaabe as they feel they have great healing power. People had been gathering there for as long as they could remember. To this day, the islands continue to be an important spiritual location and their contentious lease or claim continues to be a topic of debate and discussion.

Houle has recreated the knowledge that surrounds the Toronto Islands to tell the story of how the islands became separated from the mainland and how they were lost from the original keepers of this space.[17] The icons in this artwork confirm the longstanding relationship the Mississaugas of New Credit have with this location. The stories of place that Houle narrates through this artwork begin to unravel some of the loss experienced by the Mississaugas of New Credit.[18] At the same time Houle's artwork honours the Mississaugas and their relationship to the land, which is now the City of Toronto (Figure 5).

Situating the 'Third Space of Sovereignty' within art

Houle's works are connected to land and narrate the Indigenous stories of place that mark the City of Toronto as a sovereign Native space. The icons demonstrate that Indigenous people carry a strong and vibrant culture and dispel the myth of Indigenous societies as backward and static. As we have seen, the stories that are told through the images in

15 There were a series of meetings to confirm the Toronto Purchase.

16 The Toronto Purchase is a land treaty that covers the area that became the City of Toronto.

17 The Credit Mississaugas (the Anishinaabeg who occupied the space) requested to keep a small area of land around the mouth of the Credit River. However, this part of the agreement was verbal and the Mississaugas found themselves looking for a new home. The final purchase included the area from Etobicoke Creek to Burlington for a total amount of eighty thousand acres paid out at just under one pence per acre. The market value at the time of the purchase was about a hundred pounds for a two hundred acre lot (Freeman 2010). The difference in price is staggering but not surprising given the state of the Credit Mississaugas at the time. They had failed at trying to sell or lease their land and the population had been decimated by European disease and complications due to an increased dependency on alcohol. These negative effects included the death of many elders who carried much of the knowledge and strength of their people.

18 For more information on this time period see Smith (1988).

his artwork resist the settler ideologies implicit in the occupation of space by refusing a dialogue that places Indigenous people in the position of the colonized Other. Rather, dialogue is created through the different interactions people can have with the images and presentation of the material. It is a dialogue that steers away from what political theorist Kevin Bruyneel (2007) names is a false choice. He argues that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and, in this case, the United States of America does not have to be defined by the impossibility of ever achieving recognition in the colonial state. Nor does it need to try to arrange multiple layers of recognition and sovereignty to secure a position for Indigenous meanings and political autonomy within existing frameworks. The historical implications of recognition and sovereignty lock Indigenous people into a Western framework that is legitimized by the state/colonizer/master, or instead leaves Indigenous people to create their own understandings of these concepts within specific Western paradigms. If Indigenous people were to decide how to mobilize these terms, this could become a part of self-determination.

However, numerous theorists, including Fanon (1965), Simpson (2014), Bhabha (1994), and Coulthard (2007), have at different times argued that the situations above continue to be vexed by colonial power dynamics and the serious physiological affects of colonization. Mainstream culture in Canada and the U.S. completely rejects the notion that we are still in a colonial situation, which makes it very difficult to create space for self-determination. I am arguing that Houle's creative interventions in the City of Toronto create a space where colonial binaries are called into question and where the viewer is not obliged into a binary of colonizer/colonized. Each image communicates to both non-Indigenous and Indigenous viewers the importance of the land and Indigenous peoples' connection to it. This is seen in the knowledge behind each icon and the dialogue Houle has created between industrialization and the Anishinaabe cosmos.

Indigenous political theorist Glen Coulthard (2007) has grappled with the polarization of recognition and he suggests that transformative praxis seems to be the most viable option within the colonial binary and the politics of recognition. He argues that transformative praxis will bring the argument back to the potential of human and political emancipatory possibilities. Recognition currently rests on a historically unbalanced relationship whereas emancipation enables a situation where the actions of self-reflectivity, reconstruction, and decolonization can take place. People would have the ability to re-deploy Indigenous culture and tradition that is non-essentialist, static, or gendered. Houle's icons in *The Teamway* produce the kind of situation that Coulthard advocates for, using traditional Anishinaabe knowledge that draws on the past but is also firmly located in the twenty-first century. The works also include stories from other Indigenous nations. Through this variety, Houle has created artwork that is not essentialist, static, or gendered. Cityscapes are littered with conflicting memories and histories. History is buried, re-written, retold, or simply erased or forgotten, as new communities and developments are constructed over the old. All of these layers of historical memory begin to collide, mutate, and transform depending on who is in power and telling stories.

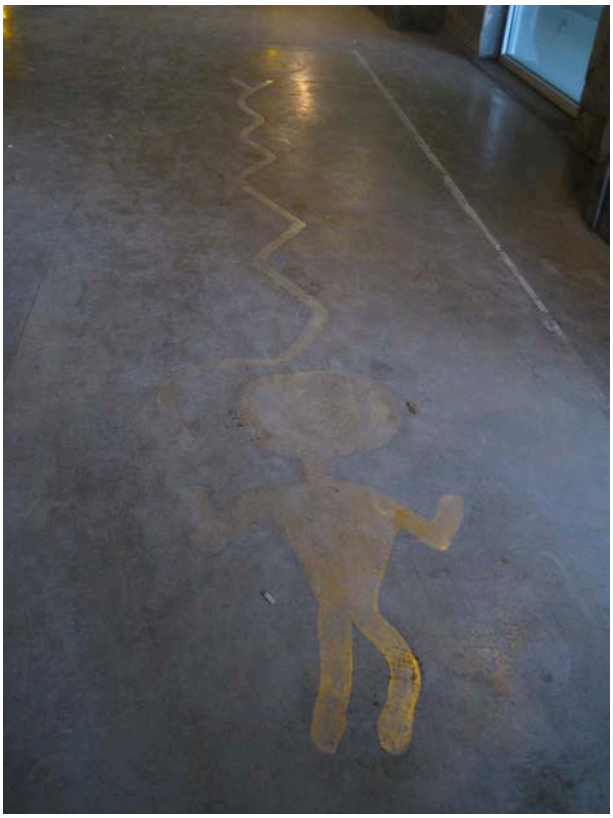

Figure 5. Robert Houle, *Shaman or Ancient Teacher*, (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

All of Houle's installations discussed in this essay deal with conflicting memories of the past and try to assert an Indigenous connection to the land that is the City of Toronto. This can be seen in the stories behind the icons and their relationship to the cosmos. For example, the story of the Great Serpent challenges the idea of modernity, and attempts to reject the contention that Indigenous people are out of time because they signed a treaty and gave up their rights to the land (the Toronto Purchase). The people in the canoe who follow the animals/creatures back to the lake challenge the idea that Indigenous people do not live in the city but only on reserves that are outside of the urban space. Coulthard (2007) has argued that Indigenous sovereignty and recognition is only acceptable when it does not threaten the ideologies of civil society. Creative interventions for the most part do not threaten the state, however, they can provoke thought and generate the spaces where transformative dialogue takes place. It is just this kind of space that is possible within the framework of Houle's artwork. These icons are urban

Figure 6. Robert Houle, *Canoe* (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

teaching rocks, making a place where people can connect with Indigenous histories in cities such as Toronto where images continue to narrate Indigenous stories of place.

Houle's artwork at York Street demonstrates an ability to rupture the either/or conundrum of the false choice and create a transformative possibility or praxis. The Great Water Serpent attacking industrial icons shows Indigenous people are always there, even when settler society defines them as absent. Similar to the Thunderbird, Ancient Teacher, or *Meeshupishu*, Indigenous people are waiting for the right moment to show their power. These creatures have the ability to transform themselves between the earth, the sky world, and the underworld. The people in the story have created the canoe and have the ability to move throughout space seamlessly, because they understand space as a network of waterways and continued relationships with land. The icons of the Fish and the Turtle are extensions of powerful relationships forged with the canoe, moving toward the water, providing food and direction for the people in the canoe. The Shaman in conversation with the Thunderbird establishes the transformation of space and place. This transaction communicates the story of the Toronto Islands; it explains that the islands and the mainland were connected. In the legend a big storm (Thunderbird) disconnected the islands from the mainland. This story goes untold at the site and can only be understood if the viewer is familiar with the images and the story they reference. Houle's images only explain segments of Indigenous stories of place and do so in layers. As with petroglyphs, there are people with more knowledge than others who can 'read'

the images differently. As Houle (interview, June 21, 2010) states, "as Anishinaabe people we read images", and the images, I suggest, tell ongoing Indigenous stories of place (Figure 6). The waterway, the creatures, and the canoe mark the land and bear witness to the stories and bodies that cover the geographic space we call home. Much of the city's memory is preserved in the formations and elements of the land. Houle's images explain some of the Indigenous worldviews, for example, related to the importance of canoes – living cultural artifacts that tell stories related to land; and to the creatures in the physical/metaphysical realm, which encompass Indigenous cultural memory as artifacts or markers that recognize Indigenous people as self-determining and autonomous beings in both metaphysical and physical space. Our identity is bound to the creation of the canoe and to relationships forged with the metaphysical beings represented in Houle's artwork. The importance of autonomy is demonstrated in the message of the images. Power resides in the act of telling and in the materials Houle has chosen, especially copper, which acts as a conductor to both worlds. Houle is part of a growing number of Indigenous people who act and tell stories of place from our own worldviews. These stories are not bound by binaries of recognition/emancipation, colonizer/colonized, or civilized/savage. Instead, ongoing Indigenous stories of place mark our power and relationships to the land that include the cityscape. We are not stuck in the archaic past, nor are we out of time. Instead, we are constantly moving throughout time and space with the knowledge of the land and the stories we hold. This is the strength of Indigenous peoples as a whole, exhibited successfully in Houle's creative work, which re-maps Indigenous stories of place and thus exhibits the power of art and the act of telling through the visual image.

The power of naming in the grid of the cityscape

The final installation I will discuss is located at the base of the first line drawn to create the east/west divide for the newly created township of York (Toronto), which is Yonge Street (Figure 7).[19] Houle installed copper metal casts along the shorefront at Queens Quay and Yonge Street that name various communities throughout Ontario starting with the closest and extending to the furthest distance from this precise location. The installation includes a lighted metal cantilever that floats over Lake Ontario. Iroquois Falls, North Bay, and Timmins are a few of the communities named along with their distances.

The artwork is located at the base of a twenty-two-mile-long North-South road completed in 1795-96 as a 'military convenience' because the British felt this was the best way to move troops in case of war with the United States (although this was never actually required). Houle's selection of this location for his work was strategic. The site marks the historic route from North to South for Indigenous traders (Houle walk). Houle intended to reconstitute the location as a Native space because of its historical

19 It was named Yonge Street after the then secretary for war for Upper Canada (Fraser 1921, 48). The road now forms the centre baseline of the City of Toronto.

relationship to Aboriginal people. The pathway contains the memories of the canoes, people, animals, and creatures that would have and still do move through that space as part of connections and relations to the land. As stated earlier, the land is a witness that holds significant value, memory, and information, and once this is understood the reader or viewer can comprehend the full impact and richness of Houle's artwork. Connection to land permeates this installation, which brings communities outside Toronto to the forefront. Many Indigenous people move back and forth from these outlying communities to the city. The artwork highlights movement through this particular space over the last ten thousand years (Figure 8).

Another 'military highway' constructed around the same time (Fraser 1921, 50) was Dundas Street. This street does not fit into the grid system, but flows through the city differently. Dundas Street was also first a path used by Indigenous people and later traders, and finally the military. A second installation connected to the first one is located at the southwest corner of Yonge and Dundas Street. This work consists of a copper cast embedded in the sidewalk that maps the original Indigenous trail of Yonge Street, 1,896 km from Toronto to Thunder Bay. The trail is surrounded by the Great Lakes. This artwork makes a direct link to the Indigenous pathways that were created around these large bodies of water (Figure 9).

Many of the first roads 'built' in Toronto followed existing trails. Later, these routes were, of course, overlaid with the official grid of the settlement plan (Fraser 1921). Davenport Road follows a path that traced the old shoreline of Lake Iroquois, and Dundas Street followed a small river system fed by Lake Iroquois draining to Lake Ontario.[20] None of these roads fit into the planned settlement grid of the city. Of course, the original pathway that is now Yonge Street did not follow a perfect line, but moved through river systems, the Great Lakes, and smaller tributaries (as seen in Houle's work at Yonge and Dundas Street). These roads are out of place amid the north-south and east-west gridlines of the city. They follow routes based on water systems, which are fluid, non-linear and aligned with concepts of Native space (Figure 10).

In addition to overlaying Indigenous pathways, the imperial roots of colonization bury themselves in the landscape through the renaming of space. Renaming the new 'found' land was one of the first acts committed by Governor General John Graves Simcoe. He renamed the landscape with English titles in an effort to eradicate Indigenous place names. Many of the British names have rooted themselves here but many Indigenous place names resisted the renaming of the land. Houle's installation uses the power of naming to portray the importance of Indigenous histories and knowledge in the creation of place names. The word Toronto is significant and carries all the Indigenous nations who once and still occupy the space, as it resisted renaming from

20 This information is based on conversations with Ron Williamson (2006-2011), David Redwolf (2007-2009), Heather Mills (2007-2011), Bill Woodworth (2006-2010) and Carl Benn (2007-2011).

Figure 7. Robert Houle, *Yonge Street the Longest Street*, (photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

Indigenous place name. In most translations it appears as 'trees on the water', but some sources specifically state 'fish weir', and others call it the 'meeting place'.

Many places in Ontario, however, lost their Indigenous names. For a brief period Toronto was renamed York, and sadly, Kingston lost its name of Cataraqui. The important route known as the Toronto Carrying Place was originally Lake Toronto but is now known as Lake Simcoe after Simcoe's father. Likewise, the Toronto River is now the Humber River, named after a river in England. Fortunately the city of Niagara (Thundering waters), kept its name, and so did the province of Ontario itself, which means 'beautiful water'. Streets have taken English titles as well, often named for past government officials and important settlers, with a few named after Indigenous nations, but usually in English or French versions. Only a few Indigenous people, such as Brant and Tecumseh, have streets named after them. As stated above, it was important for Houle to have an Anishinaabe street name at the location of one of his artworks to make a connection to the ancient ones. Houle's works place water systems at the forefront and challenge the colonial naming of the city. They do this through images and information. As McKittrick (2006, xxii) states, "naming place is also an act of naming the self and self-histories". Houle presents Indigenous histories in all of these artworks, acting to establish self-histories and create an Indigenous presence. He also makes connections to how colonial settlement altered the land when it was re-mapped to suit the principles of others.

Figure 8. Robert Houle, *Toronto*,
(photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

All of the artworks discussed here demonstrate a strong connection not only to land but also to cosmos. There is relationship that has formed within the central axis of the cosmos. All of the artworks communicate the three elements of earth, sky, and water. The sky is shown through the Thunderbird and its power to change or transform a situation. The water is evident in the movements depicted in the works connected to waterways and to the creatures and mythical beings linked to the water. The earth/land connection is demonstrated by embedding the artworks in the ground, and by measuring distances from place to place. The land is also contained in the symbols of the trees and other creatures living on the earth's surface. Houle has created artworks that operate in the logic of Native space through all of these connections to land, water, and sky. Each visual image contributes to the narration of Indigenous stories of place, stories that are never fixed or static, stories that are part of an Indigenous worldview and continue a longstanding tradition of centring the cosmos linked to the three elements of sky, earth, and water. These stories are fluid and transformative; they hold within them ten thousand years of Indigenous history and vital connections to water systems and land. In Houle's artworks the articulation of space is grounded in an understanding of land tied to Indigenous stories of place.

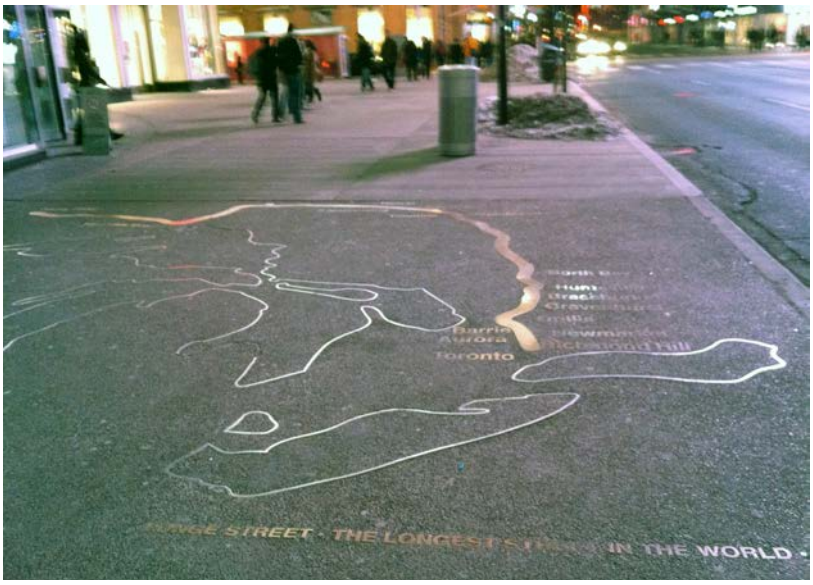

Figure 9. Robert Houle, Yonge and Dundas Map,
(photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

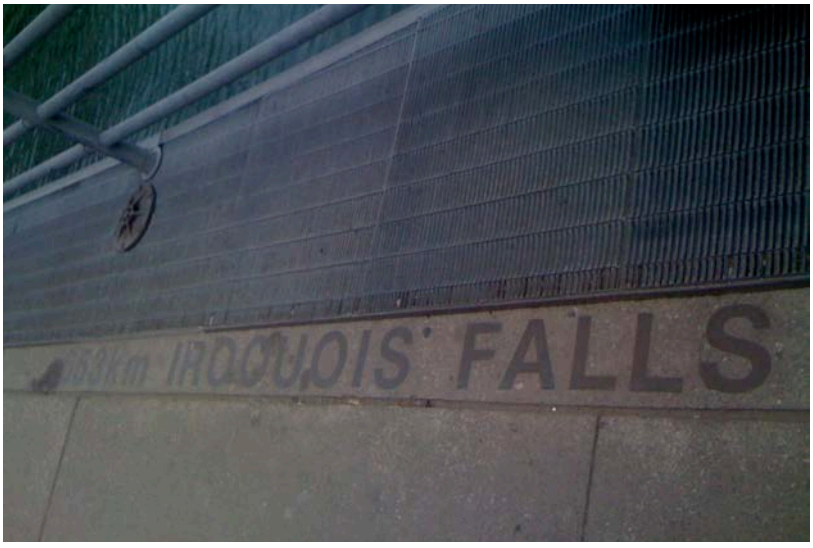

Figure 10. Robert Houle, *Iroquois Falls*,
(photo: Julie Nagam, 2010).

From the Anishinaabe perspective there are two kinds of oral/visual narratives: there are stories that refer to the events that occur to human beings everyday, sometimes including more exceptional events; and there are stories that are considered myths (*atiso'kanak*) or sacred stories that include living entities (Hallowell 1975, 49-50). All of the narratives in Houle's artworks fall into the latter category because they make links between human and non-human relations based on aspects of sacred stories. My research reveals the concealed geographies of the City of Toronto and at the same time illuminates existing Indigenous stories of place through Houle's artworks. Alternative cartographies that visually rupture the colonial master narrative of Canada and Houle's artwork confronts practices of subjugation and builds place-based critiques (McKittrick 2006) of colonialism to (re)create and (re)imagine Indigenous relationships to space. Houle's artwork remaps the City of Toronto by imposing his knowledge and visual images on the actual space and histories of the land through relationships to water.

Through this article I want readers to interpret Houle's artwork as a narrative that tells Indigenous stories of place. These stories reaffirm Indigenous ties to Native and alternative sovereign spaces present in the City of Toronto. The artworks communicate ideas of Native space by placing waterways and land at the forefront. Houle has created visual images that challenge and disrupt the constructed grid system through a kind of imaginary/temporal space. This space allows for a transformative dialogue that includes multiple narratives within Indigenous stories of place. The dialogue the artworks create attempts to dismantle the colonizer/colonized binary in favour of a transformative space that allows people to interact with Houle's artworks without playing into traditional colonial roles, thus enabling viewers to explore Indigenous stories of place. The power of these artworks lies in the act of reclaiming the area as Indigenous sovereign space through visual narratives representing Indigenous self-histories tied to concepts of Native space. Concepts of Native space are constantly being reiterated through creative interventions with solid foundations in cosmology and Indigenous worldviews and by sharng those stories with whomever will listen. *Meegwetch*.

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